

Member Questions for Council – 25 September 2024

Question	Response
<p>Question 1 from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Over the weekend of 7th and 8th September, a severe leak resulted in a huge amount of rainwater entering Trinity Road causing extensive damage to ceilings, storage rooms, paper files and the electrical system such that neither the heating nor security systems were operational.</p> <p>To my knowledge, over the 20 years I have worked in Trinity Road there have been several very heavy rainfalls (particularly the floods of 2007) but no significant leaks or damage.</p> <p>Why has rainwater caused such extensive damage just after £1 million plus has been spent on major works to the roof? What steps are being taken to identify the cause and who is liable for the costs?</p>	<p>The section of the roof where the leak happened was not significantly changed during the recent roofing project. Only minor repairs were done in that area, and they were completed to the correct standards. We don't believe those repairs caused the leak.</p> <p>The problem seems to have been caused by the extremely heavy rainfall. The rainwater couldn't drain away fast enough, so it rose up from a sump (a low spot where water collects and drains through a downpipe) and seeped under the roof tiles. To investigate further, we are using cameras to inspect the internal downpipes for blockages or leaks. Since these pipes run inside the building, they can't be checked from outside.</p> <p>There haven't been leaks in this area before, so no redesign or extra protection was considered necessary. However, we are now planning and costing measures to prevent this from happening again.</p> <p>The Council is working with its insurer, and a loss adjuster has already visited the site. The damage to the building and server room will be included in the insurance claim.</p> <p>This administration is clear that Trinity Road will remain the Council's home for the foreseeable future and the administration is committed to investing in the building to ensure it remains a great workplace, fostering creativity</p>

and enabling our staff to deliver their best for residents.

Supplementary question from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Mike Evey, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Councillor Fowles thanked Councillor Evey for his answer and to officers for their work in dealing with the situation at Trinity Road. It was asked if there were any other buildings affected by rainwater and would there be a survey of the Council's properties to avoid a similar situation in the future.

Councillor Evey confirmed that there had been some issues at the Old Station due to its condition, but this was being managed by officers. It was noted that the incident at Trinity Road was a reminder of the risks posed from having older buildings which have required more maintenance, and that staff had worked hard over unsociable hours to respond to the incidents. Asset Management Plans for all of the Council's properties were being drawn up to survey the current status of these assets, and these would come forward for discussion and decisions.

Question 2 from Councillor Tony Slater to Councillor Mike Evey, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

The recent flood at Trinity Road caused significant damage to the building, critical IT infrastructure and stored documents, and had a seriously detrimental impact on the ability to work effectively from the

The flooding at Trinity Road affected the building's connectivity and security doors, but all council services to residents continued as normal. This was managed with a reduced number of staff working on-site and through home working.

Wi-Fi connectivity was restored for most areas, and public Wi-Fi, along with the webcasting system in the Council Chamber, was operational by the

<p>building.</p> <p>Please can you confirm that all critical data and records, whether stored digitally or in paper hard copy, were safely recovered and not compromised in anyway and what control measures are in place to ensure the resilience of CDC infrastructure in the future?</p>	<p>planning committee meeting on the 11th. Video conferencing in key rooms was also reinstated within a few days.</p> <p>Regarding data safety, there were no storage systems located in the affected ICT Network Distribution room. All data is stored elsewhere within Trinity Road and is backed up to other locations at least once every 24 hours, sometimes more frequently.</p> <p>The property and ICT teams worked efficiently, even during evenings and weekends, to resolve the issues, and they were instrumental in restoring services quickly. Their efforts are a credit to the Council.</p>
<p>Supplementary from Councillor Tony Slater to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Councillor Slater thanked Councillor Evemy for his answer. It was noted that some organisations have data centres off-site or through a cloud based solution, and it was asked whether this would be an appropriate option for CDC to prevent catastrophic loss of data given the fragility of the Trinity Road offices?</p>	<p>Councillor Evemy replied that the Council did have backups to ensure data was protected. However, he was not aware of the specifics regarding the ICT systems of the Council, and a written answer would be given following consultation with the relevant officers.</p>
<p>A supplementary response was provided to Councillor Tony Slater by email on 30 September 2024. However, due to the sensitive</p>	

information around ICT infrastructure, the response is marked as exempt under Schedule 12A Para. 3 Local Government Act 1972.

Question 3 from Councillor Len Wilkins to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

Following the recent cyber-attack on neighbouring Tewkesbury Borough Council, please could you confirm that discussions will take place with Tewkesbury and other specialist external bodies involved in resolving the matter, to fully understand the causes and any lessons that can be learnt?

Are you satisfied that member and staff training on cyber security is sufficient and there is a policy of continual improvement in this area to battle this ever-evolving threat?

Yes, I can confirm that our ICT team has already been in contact with Tewkesbury Borough Council and is working with them as they recover their systems. We have also shared technical information with other Districts and the County Council.

Once Tewkesbury has made further progress in their recovery, additional discussions will take place.

Over the past year, we have provided Cyber Security training to all members and staff. On 18th September, we started a Cyber refresher course, and following that, we will introduce Data Protection training, which includes aspects of Cyber Security.

Thanks to the Council's investment in August 2022, we now have a dedicated Cyber Team equipped with advanced security tools. We are continuously improving and upgrading these tools to stay ahead of cyber threats.

Question 4 from Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Missed waste collections in Ermin Ward and other parts of the district over the last three months have been prolific, happily I can report that they have abated, but not yet ceased. However, throughout this period some

The waste team is committed to reviewing and improving the reporting processes following the recent round re-organisation. This review will include an evaluation of the entire online process, from residents reporting missed collections to crews addressing the issue, ensuring it is effective and allows residents to accurately report missed containers.

<p>residents have been unable to use the CDC website missed waste collection reporting tool, because a missed collection in their area had already been reported. This caused great frustration and concern, not only because missed collections could not be logged, but they could not tell what type of waste had already been reported, so people were left in the dark. Furthermore, many villages who had reported missed collections were not included in the published list. Is the reporting tool being redesigned to make it more accessible, accurate, transparent and easy to use?</p>	<p>The review will also look into the messages residents receive when reporting missed collections. This will include issues like 'gate checks,' where crews may indicate bins weren't placed out for collection or were contaminated, which currently prevents residents from logging missed bins.</p> <p>Key stakeholders, including customer services and the digital team, will be involved in the review, and extensive user testing will be conducted to ensure the tool is accessible and easy to use.</p> <p>Once again, I apologise to residents who have been inconvenienced because of the issues that have arisen following the recent round reorganisation.</p>
<p>Supplementary from Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Councillor Judd thanked Councillor Evemy for his response. It was noted that residents were frustrated as they could not report their missed waste collections. It was asked how these systems were tested to ensure the data being collected was accurate?</p>	<p>Councillor Evemy noted the frustration of residents who could not access the online reporting systems. It was highlighted that this was being reviewed, and that he would work with all Members to get their perspectives and help make the systems accessible for residents. Some of the issues were due to wider service failures which were known by Ubico, and therefore could not be reported unless the follow-up collection had not been completed. It was highlighted that this could be made clearer to residents on the online process.</p>
<p>Question 5 from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</p> <p>Given the Deputy Prime Minister's enthusiasm for a nationwide introduction of a 4-day working week,</p>	<p>We currently have no plans to introduce a 4-day working week for staff at Cotswold District Council although we will continue to monitor how successful it is at other local authorities and businesses.</p>

<p>could the leader confirm that the Liberal Democrat administration have no plans to introduce a 4-day working week for staff at CDC?</p>	<p>If new legislation is proposed on this matter, we will carefully review the details and any obligations it may place on organisations like ours.</p> <p>For reference under a four-day week, officers are expected to carry out 100 per cent of their work, in around 80% of their contracted hours, for 100 per cent of their pay.</p> <p>I've recently returned from an LGA peer review at South Cambridgeshire District Council where they've been trialling a four-day week. An independent report has shown that the trial is working well; of 24 key performance indicators monitored by the Council 22 improved or remained the same. Use of expensive agency staff has fallen saving South Cambridgeshire taxpayers' money.</p>
<p>Supplementary from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</p> <p>It was asked whether the response would mean that this is not being ruled out as an option, and how this would apply to partner organisations like Ubico?</p>	<p>Councillor Joe Harris reaffirmed that there were no current plans to do this, but that the Council would need to monitor any changes to legislation in the future and respond accordingly.</p>
<p>Question 6 from Councillor Daryl Corps to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</p> <p>Your intention to build more, much needed, social-rented homes in the District is well publicised.</p>	<p>The delivery of social-rented homes is a key priority for the council's administration. Since May 2023, several steps have been taken to advance this goal, including the following:</p>

What steps has this administration taken since May 2023, and what plans do you have in place, to build more social-rented homes and how many new units do you envisage these plans will deliver by 2030?

1. **New Housing Leadership:** In May 2024, the Council hired a new Strategic Housing lead to take a more proactive role in delivering affordable housing.
2. **Site Allocation and Planning Policy Updates:** The Council is working on updating planning policies to prioritize affordable housing in the Local Plan update.
3. **Outreach to Landowners:** We are engaging with landowners of potential sites to bring these forward in tandem with the Local Plan update.
4. **Rural Exception Sites:** We are using Rural Exception Sites to deliver additional affordable housing, leveraging our membership in the Gloucestershire Rural Housing Partnership (GRHP) and our collaboration with the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC).
5. **Strategic Site Exploration:** We are considering strategic sites across the Cotswold district for potential affordable housing development.
6. **Council-Owned Assets Review:** We are reviewing Council-owned assets for possible affordable housing opportunities.
7. **Public Sector Collaboration:** We are working with public sector partners (e.g., NHS, Fire and Rescue, Police) through the One Public Estate Programme to explore affordable housing options.
8. **Partnerships with Housing Providers:** We are encouraging Registered Providers and developers to be proactive and engaged in delivering affordable housing in the district.
9. **Collaboration with Homes England:** Strengthening our relationship with Homes England to gain their support in delivering affordable homes.

- 10. **Use of S106 Affordable Housing Funds:** We are establishing a protocol for using retained S106 funds to support further affordable housing provision.
- 11. **Progression of the Down Ampney site:** We have entered a partnership with Bromford housing association and are progressing plans to deliver low-carbon affordable homes which will be built on a small plot of land in Down Ampney that the council owns. We hope to use this as a model for future small developments in villages.
- 12. **Exploration of new models of housing delivery:** We are looking at how the council can more directly intervene in the housing market in future. This includes looking at the council directly delivering social rented homes again or establishing a housing company to do so like Cheltenham have in Cheltenham Borough Homes.

Regarding the number of homes, the housing target is currently under review, due to new the new Labour Government’s proposals to amend the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which is still in consultation.

The current Local Plan aims to deliver around 3,300 new homes (all tenures) from 2024 to 2031, though this figure may rise with the expected change.

We welcome the new Government’s emphasis on the delivery of social rented homes, and we await more details on what the impact in our District will be.

Supplementary from Councillor Daryl Corps to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

Councillor Joe Harris noted that social rent was the most affordable tenure of housing for people in the Cotswolds where the cost of housing had gone up

<p>It was noted that social rented homes were so important, and it was asked when the delivery of these homes would take place, and how would these be funded?</p>	<p>substantially. It was highlighted that a Housing Strategy document was being finalised, and this would be part of the Local Plan. In regard to the funding of new houses, this would be on a case-by-case basis and work with housing associations to bring schemes forward. However, the Council would be ambitious to deliver affordable housing for residents where it could.</p>
<p>Question 7 from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Having recently looked at the freshly renovated parts of the Trinity Road building which Watermoor Point are now marketing as office space on behalf of the council I was amazed at how big an area it is when also taking into account the various side offices on two floors off the main atrium. As I understand it there has been some interest, but no tenants are yet signed up.</p> <p>How attractive are the rents compared to those in Watermoor Point itself and is consideration being given to lower them should the market dictate, to attract tenants and much needed income from this asset?</p>	<p>The management agreement with Watermoor Point was finalised on 6 September, and the first tenant moved in on 18 September. Watermoor Point is currently marketing the remaining office space, and we expect additional tenants to move in soon.</p> <p>The rental rates are similar to those at Watermoor Point’s HQ site, as Watermoor Point sets the rents based on current market conditions. The high-quality office space, competitive rent, and flexible terms offered to tenants are expected to generate significant interest.</p> <p>We will closely monitor and report on the income generated to ensure it meets our financial targets.</p>
<p>Supplementary from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p>	<p>Councillor Evemy noted that the original financial figures were reviewed in February 2024, but these were determined by the market interest. The Council was working with Watermoor Point to let space, and that there was interest in this. It was highlighted that there was no budgeted income, but</p>

Councillor Blomefield noted that the original plans for letting space to generate income had been delayed, since they were first presented to Members. It was asked when the Council could expect a sufficient number of tenants to meet the financial targets, and did these financial targets remain the same as from the original plans?

this would be monitored closely in order to make a projection for future income to be generated.